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Visual methods and methodologies

Introduction:

In this chapter my aim is to suggest that an engagement with visuality is worthwhile, may be even necessary, for qualitative methods in geography. In doing this I want to push the case for these methods when despite sometimes warm words there are relatively few examples of their use. Indeed if one were to look at the methods in qualitative textbooks in geography, then the overwhelming dominance is of linguistic sources – be they written and/or spoken. I will focus upon methods connected to the production of what we might call visual ethnographies. In doing this I want to highlight not a set of techniques, as though they were some items on an *a la carte* menu, but also paradoxes in the ways visual material is treated in geographical work. That is I want to highlight an ambivalence around visuality and its treatment in geography, and point to some theoretical critiques and slippages. I shall throughout this chapter be trying to position the visual as being used for more than just creating ‘data’ to be brought into accounts. Rather I am trying to suggest it may figure more prominently in finalised versions and as outputs. In this I must confess my complicity as a long time cheerleader for visual research and new forms of visuality without really developing those forms. I shall effectively focus upon photographic and video work. This is not to deny the good work done in terms of other visual methods – such as respondent drawings and maps (see for example Young and Barrett 2001). Partly my aim is to focus on visual media at a time when they are proliferating in society, and thus may form either (and I would argue both) a topic for study and a means for studies. It is also a time when visual ways of knowing have come under intense and refined critique within the discipline.

My starting point is a sense that ‘visual methods’ may almost have been killed off before they were born in qualitative geography by powerful arguments about the problematic elements of visual knowledge – and in geography especially. A variety of visual methods, and especially the long reliance on modes of observational practice in landscape work and visual tropes for truth and knowledge across the discipline, have been criticised for assumptions of detachment and objectivity of knower leading to objectification of the known. Recently the issue of representational knowledge has been challenged *tout court* – and the visual seems perhaps inescapably bound to the representational. It has become common to hear the refrain that geography is a ‘visual discipline’ – and that this in some sense is a problem or limitation. But often ‘those asserting the occularcentrism of geography, do so only as a prelude to other sensory articulations of knowledge’ (Rose 2003, page 212) to produce what might be claimed as a more rounded version of the discipline. Just as classical

anthropology positioned textual approaches against embodied experience (Csordas 1993), so in geography the visual is said to have been opposed to the embodied. Vision is positioned as the problem both in how geographers know and a powerful locus of practice within the discipline. There is much to gain from taking this line of argument seriously and I will work with and through some of these problematics below. And yet, as I browse through geographical journals, I am not exactly overwhelmed by the deployment of visual media. My contention is that we have allowed one sense of visuality, with a troubling past, to rather dominate our critical understanding of what visual methods might comprise or what they might do.

This chapter will begin with a review of some of the classic heritages of visual knowledge in geography, and their politics and legacies. It will develop an account of some of the deployments of visual methods, and different modes of visuality therein. The chapter will examine visual ethnographies that seek to offer an engaged, participatory form of seeing and set it against a more ironic and perhaps even alienated, critical forms of seeing. It will conclude by trying to refigure how we think of seeing as representing rather than a medium of connecting and making present. It will thus ask about the how we might show what is not seen, when it cannot be pictured and how we might think about vision not as the antithesis of touch but through a haptic register.

Disciplinary visualities and exhibitionary complexes

The phrase disciplinary visualities is used by Rose (2003) to point to the way disciplines have specific ways of looking at the world - shaping how we see, what we see and indeed what is visible, and, in geography's case, may be even defining knowledge as the visible (rather than the sayable). She points out that different academic communities have rather different visual cultures. For geography one could find numerous examples, from the technologies of visualisation in sections and maps to the most explicit statements by those such as Patrick Geddes and the Regional Survey Movement of the 20s and 30s. Geddes' 'outlook' tower mobilised a camera obscura and the regional surveys called for expeditions to elevated points to place sight in the service of regional synthesis via the gaze from above (Matless 1992). These visualities are technologies, in the broad sense, that discipline both observer and observed. Indeed Rogoff (2000) has used the phrase 'geography's visual culture' to highlight that vision is always geographically embedded so we might think of 'positioned spectatorship' as an 'understanding of geography as an epistemological structure, of visual culture as the arena in which it circulates' (page 11). In this sense Bennett (1988) uses 'exhibitionary complex' to talk about the rise of technologies of display. Here he is

trying to move beyond simplistic readings of Foucault that suggest the fall of spectacular and the rise of hidden modes of disciplinary power, to look at the mode of governmentality produced by new technologies of display and vision. Thus, if we are looking for archetypal devices framing society's way of seeing we should recall the moment in history that gave us the Panopticon also gave us the Crystal Palace and the Great Exhibitions. By 1893 the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago could have the motto 'To See is to Know'. These technologies of vision rendered the world knowable and controllable in a particular regime of truth.

In geography, critiques have highlighted how such an objectivised technology of vision rendered especially colonised landscapes and people into objects of an inquiring gaze. A gaze, that in nineteenth century accounts of the near east, 'rendered "Egypt" as a transparent space that could be fully known by a colonial, colonizing gaze' (Gregory 2003, page 196). Indeed in works such as the *Description de l'Egypte* it is clear 'that this was a *particular* vision of Egypt goes without saying, but it was also a particular *vision* of Egypt: the special significance of the *Description* ... is that it valorized a visual appropriation of the Orient' (ibid, page 197). The landscape and people of Egypt were reduced, first, in scientific images then in popular ones to a series of abstracted spaces, framed through the lens. A visual regime defined places, people and things through typologies – each image exemplifying a type of person or scene – and provided a distanced and detached viewpoint from which to examine them. The connection of visual appropriation to colonial modernity was so strong that Çelik (2004, page 616-7) writes that in Algeria photography was a privileged means 'to convey the 'reality' of the colony to the metropole. The conquest was repeated by capturing Algeria visually'. Thus Félix Jean Moulin's eighteen-month expedition to Algeria in 1856–7, was reported in the weekly journal *La Lumière* as being commissioned to 'bring to France ... precise documents on the little known habits and customs, on the habitations of diverse populations living in towns, on the monuments, sites, etc of our great African colony' (ibid).

The apparent facticity of pictures belied the development of a series of limited tropes and stock images that were both framed by colonial power and staged that power. Thus a genre of 'courtyard pictures' in North Africa offered a privileged glimpse into the 'interior' of indigenous society, a gaze whose desire to see feminised interiors of housing expressed a palpably gendered desire for mastery, with fantasies of unveiling and accessing the inaccessible, driving a colonial metaphysics of truth (Yegenoglu 1998). Through depictions of exoticised and 'chaotic' old cities, to the interiors of 'local' houses, visual media enabled the progressive penetration of colonized spaces in a dialectic of mystery and mastery. If such spectacular systems of visual consumption reached their apogee with the World Fairs, Colonial Expositions and Expositions Universelle, then we can still trace the

tropes and visual practices, spreading out and across intersecting practices. Thus the *ghawazi*, female dancers ('belly dancers') of Egypt had been a long established tradition (predating Islam) that comprised unveiled women performing in the street or in men's quarters or courtyards on special occasions. By the mid-nineteenth century performances in public were being suppressed and the dance was being hidden from view in Egypt. In Algeria, the dance performed by the Ouled-Nail's was moving from a rural to an urban event, with commercialization tied to the growth of prostitution under the colonial regime. However, it became an increasingly popular, and singular staple of colonial expositions, Orientalist art and western imaginations – rapidly developing into a circulating industry of semi-pornographic representations of 'Moorish' dances, by then staged in Paris (Çelik and Kinney 1990). Taken from its context, the visual economy made this a protable symbol of the exoticised and eroticised east. Indeed the colonial visual economies of ethnography and pornography come uncomfortably close to each other. Although ethnography proscribes the eroticization of the Other, both show scopophilic intentions while keeping the Other at a safe distance, both are governed by a desire to see and have highly developed codified systems to control this fascination (Russell 1999, page 122).

This visual fascination is not isolated historically or geographically to the nineteenth century near east. Similar patterns, though with inflections, can be traced across the globe. In the Pacific islands, some 6500 glass plates of 'village life' taken by Beckes in the 1880s, not only conflated different cultures, but were then recycled through to the 1930s to produce postcards so that 'the 'other' assumes a shocking portability' (Stephen 1995, page 64). The politics of the gaze remained aggressively gendered where to state the obvious for Polynesia, 'the foreign is feminised and regarded voyeuristically' with so many semi-clad women pictured amongst foliage as though 'Woodland Nymphs' (Thomas 1995, page 46). 'The women are thus overtly transposed into a radically remote domain of fantasy, a fairyland that is distant not only from the metropolitan societies, but also from the ordinary circumstances of Polynesian life' (ibid page 49). Though we should note that while Polynesia was feminised and sexualised, Melanesia tended to be pictured as an aggressive masculine domain of rudimentary technology (Wright 2003). More subtle and supple situations can be found, where the balance of fantasy, fascination and facticity are delicately poised. If we turn to Barton's photography in Papua New Guinea, his scientific imagery of semi-naked women studiously tries to avoid mentioning what it obviously depicts, where in one case a hand drawn box highlights the bare torso, and especially left breast, of a woman. Barton's stated purpose was to point out the location of tattoos. Tattoos that were to be recorded and conveyed thus realistically, yet also required his intervention -- painting over the tattoos on the women's body to render them visible in the picture. Indeed here we might say 'ethnography is a pretext, a ruse that

allowed Barton to indulge his voyeurism, the referencing of tattooing serving to veil what might otherwise make the photograph less acceptable' (Wright 2003, page 148). The controlling, apparently detached, yet deeply fascinated (and implicated gaze) that transforms people's bodies or places into fragmented attributes and details for a scientific gaze is a recurring motif in this colonial vision.

An ethnographic gaze aided by the new technologies of photographic reproduction could portray and indeed create "specimens" with precision. It is also paralleled by other visual techniques where tourism brought the discourses of modernity, primitivism, visualism, and anthropology together with the commodification of new colonial possessions, such as Hawai'i, as pleasure zones (Desmond 1999). The entanglement of the two scopic regimes of colonialism and tourism can be seen in a visual economy where photography is an incitement to a sort of interrogative vision (Bourdieu 1990) which drives an accumulatory economy of experience (Sontag 1977). The parallels of practice between colonising vision and leisured photography are many and multi-layered. They feed into each other as images are produced and circulated that relate promiscuously to these registers of science and pleasure. Nor is this purely a historical connection, with colonial tropes persisting in touristic visibility (Bate 1992). Indeed the constellation of knowledge, vision, desire, race, gender and power remains depressingly robust. The art critic Lucy Lippard was lead to remark that after ploughing through heaps of travel magazines with a sort of 'dead eye' that: 'Tourism is about desire -- desire for change, but also a more sensuous desire to become intimate with the unfamiliar.. The exotic other is most often female. Gender joins race on the manipulated bottom line of tourism. [With seduction and adventure both] embodied as male goals in female flesh' (1999, pages 50-1). Olivia Jenkins likewise looking through brochures would point to the continual, blatant offering up of female bodies as part of the scenery of desire - often western women tourists framing the picture, sharing a gaze directed onto either the same scene but positioned slightly ahead so they are gazing subjects, but also objects of a gaze in this 'rear view' (Jenkins 2003).

This history of visual technologies suggests their vital role in disciplining and controlling both the subjects of knowledge but also the modes of knowing. The notion of visibility stresses that it is how things become 'seeable', and are made visible that is important not just what we see (Foster 1988). That is we need to see technologies and techniques creating a field in which certain things become apparent, and some things are occluded. This is a scopic regime of knowledge which 'imposes a systematicity on the visual field; a structuring effect on who sees, through the constitution of the viewing subject, and on what is seen, through the production of a space of constructed visibility that allows particular objects to be seen in determinate ways' (Gregory 2003, page 224). Moreover,

things become apparent only in ways specific to that way of seeing and an attendant regime of knowledge. Thus the flat, fragmenting colonial gaze hides hosts of histories of entanglement and power between coloniser and colonized. Of course there are also more inflections on this process, the emptying of some landscapes, the naturalising of others, the feminising of different ones. My purpose here was to illustrate why, having established the power and historical importance of visual methods in some rather unsavoury ways of knowing, it might seem the best thing to do is move away from the visual altogether.

The above account has in many ways become familiar – though not to the extent that it does not bear repetition. To it, and in part because of it, we might add a general theoretical hostility to modes of knowledge that depend upon an optical register (Jay 1993; Jenks 1995). There have indeed been well made criticisms of correspondence theories of truth, of the classic model of visual knowledge ordering an exterior and detached world from a privileged interior (Crary 1990). Indeed from Heidegger onwards we can trace a fundamental ontological critique of the visual as being a representational practice that means a separation from our world and a distancing from experience. Derrida developed a critique of what he termed the ‘heliopolitics’ of truth models founded on ‘photology’ - notions of light and seeing (Levin 1997, page 405) - building from how he saw ‘Levinas describing the interconnected concepts of vision, sun, light, and truth as functioning to abolish the otherness of the face-to-face or ethical relation in the works of philosophers from Plato to Heidegger’ (Taylor 2006, #4). Derrida argues that the ‘ancient clandestine friendship between light and power, the ancient complicity between theoretical objectivity and technico-political possession To see and to know, to have and to will, unfold only within the oppressive and luminous identity of the same’ (136: 91-2 cited in Taylor 2006, #5).

Drawing on this background theory, work using visual methods in geography has been critiqued for an implicit notion of ‘pure vision – vision that is uncorrupted by secondary connotations of knowledge and cognition’ (Kearnes 2000, page 338). That is, visual methods that imply an appeal to the authority, indeed facticity, of vision (in photography) as somehow ontologically prior to the troublesome and difficult issues of knowledge and epistemology – that seeing is prior to saying. Thus Dodman argues that whereas the ‘research voice is often intrusive and imperial’, the ‘use of self-directed photography as a research method can therefore help to prevent many of the problems associated with representing the viewpoint of another person’ (2003: 294). Kearnes in contrast suggests a reliance on the ‘obviousness’ of vision allows one to imply a transparency about world and picture, that can suggest the visual offers ‘raw data’ as if bypassing troublesome issues of constructing knowledge (2000, page 333). Such a critique means that getting people to take pictures

of their environments can lead to accusations of a sort of empiricism (the object of Kearnes critique was work by Markwell 2000a ; his cogent and remarkably gentle response was Markwell 2000b). Indeed it might discourage using visual methods tout court, as when Kindon comments that ‘given the tensions associated with ‘the gaze’, it is not surprising that few geographers have used video within their research to date’ (2003, page 143). However this critique of ‘pure vision’ seems to me to rather miss the details shown by more scrupulous histories which suggest that the model of vision in colonial knowledge are historically contingent (Crary 1990) and that different historico-geographies of an embodied vision embedded in worldly practice can be retrieved (Atherton 1997) offering different spatial formations for knowledge.

Disruptive vision, playful pictures, withdrawing sight and abyssal geographies

Let me first suggest that a sensitive use of visual methods is important precisely to access some of the above problematics. That is, far from using a notion of transparency or objectivity we can use the visual to stage just those assumptions about knowledge. So we might sketch out a variety of strategies which range from attempts to disrupt the assumptions of visual truth, to those that use the aesthetic registers to emphasise a creativity – an artistry – and a form of knowledge founded not on verisimilitude but creative expression, to approaches that focus on what cannot be shown and finally those who point to limits of representation. These latter trends I am badging with notions of withdrawal or the ‘abyssal’ to suggest that far from vision functioning as a naturalistic, foundational form of knowledge, it as a gap or an absence.

We might begin with precisely the orientalist vision that objectified and fixed people. This has indeed been actively countered by attempts to become subjects, rather than objects, of vision. Projects such as Arab Women Speak out have focused on producing videos documenting the unseen lives of Arab women, produced by Arab women for audiences of other Arab women – to render their struggles visible and through becoming seen, to build solidarity and commonality (Underwood and Jabre 2003). Participatory video work may give a ‘photovoice’ (McIntyre 2003) to represent what is important to people, partly by what they choose to picture but also by allowing respondents to edit the output and document their own lives according to their own lights (Dodman 2003). For instance in work with children, using pictures as the basis of discussion or activities may offer an engaging process that offers a means to express their own ideas not so keyed to verbal skills (Cappello 2005). Indeed embedding visual production in a local culture, enabling participants to represent themselves according to their own priorities, to become producers of their own images

rather than objects of others has been one of the abiding aims of Participatory Video and Indigenous Media initiatives (for examples see Aufderheider 1993; Thede and Ambrosi 1991; Turner 1991; White 2003). For instance, the *Raíces Mágicas* (Magic roots) project in the 1990s, in Ocána in Colombia, worked with youngsters capitalizing on their dreams of access to glamorous mass media, to get them to conduct oral histories with local elders as a means on strengthening community cohesion and intergenerational understanding – in both directions. Two upshots were clear. First ‘even though the formal history or the pervasive violence in the region would not be changed by the workshop, Raíces Mágicas was having a definite impact on the children’s sense of belonging to their collective roots, and on their individual perceptions o themselves’ and second that the video less a product than a pretext to engender community activity (Gómez 2003, pages 217-18). Similar participatory work with the Maori *Te Iwi o Ngaati Hauiti* led to the establishment of a Community Video Research Team with academics and locals as collaborators who together researched, designed, shot and edited a short video about *waahi tapu* (sacred places) in their *rohe* (territorial area of influence) and set it to one of their *waiata* (songs) (Kindon 2003, page 145). Again this is about locating control of process and representation with respondents.

The dangers in this visual method are fourfold. First, that we are in some senses operating with a Faustian pact. These images are not made in a visual vacuum. They can be taken up and recirculated by other media and we risk asking people to become collaborators in their own visual commodification. It may be that if this was going to happen anyway participatory approaches are the most benign form. It may also be that the additional impact of visual media is a consideration in presenting materials for policy makers (McIntyre 2003 , page 48). Second, these interventions focus on video as process. We have to be aware of the full effects – for instance anthropologists have been wary that supplying selected people with cameras and the consequent power to define the group image changes or strengthens internal group power relations and dynamics. It can also impact on cultural dynamics as formerly evolving oral or performed traditions are now recorded and ‘fixed’ for posterity (Turner 1991). Third, the pressure to document can produce a sort of confessional effect. Thus work with video diaries offers people a chance to narrate their own lives and events (for a discussion see Holliday 2000; Lomax and Casey 1998; Pink 2001). They also though produce a compulsion to document. In a Foucauldian sense we are producing a particular kind of subjectivity here. Fourthly, there is a risk that it can fall back on a sort of realism. While the urge to allow people to document their conditions is a powerful and important motivation, the risk is that these recordings do get ‘treated simply as “visual facts”’ (Kindon 2003, page 147). Now that may be a risk of all qualitative methods, where hearing people’s ‘real’ voices and giving a sense of ethnographic immediacy have long been problematised, but with visual media the pitfalls of realism

seem especially profound. As Kindon (2003, page 149) notes ‘All uses of video, including those that are participatory, build in specific ways of seeing; there is no unmediated image only, ‘highly specific visual possibilities, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organising worlds’ (Haraway 1991, 190)’.

One response is to use visual documents to throw into focus contradictions and tensions, so that rather than representing a seamless whole or way of life they offer a ‘transgressive validity’ by confronting the limits of representations (Guba and Lincoln 2005). Thus Becker (2000) in a project on the community gardens of Stockholm that are used by people from Finland, SE Asia, Turkish muslims, Turkish Syrians/Assyrians, people from Syria and Lebanon – spent 6 years on and off in interviews and walking tours producing 900 colour prints, 30 b/w rolls of film. Her pictures had first a documentary role (recording her visits, recording what was there, and over time recording change), second, were a tool for establishing relations with respondents (photography facilitated contact with South East Asian gardeners but actually inhibited that with older middle eastern women) and, third, produced a form of output for analysis and presentation. In this area of open public sight it seemed a useful strategy, and one which over the years revealed what was not seen as much as seen. Not one picture recorded intercultural activity, unless led by the researcher. Indeed a public exhibition tried to present this as a challenge to locals. Despite this an editor in the media reporting the exhibition spliced together photographs to make a layout headlined ‘A Botanical UN’ which repeated ‘a popular view of what community gardening represents also in Swedish society’ mobilising a blooming backdrop, linked to clear signs of ethnic difference to suggest some harmonious natural ecology (Becker, 2000 page 119).

So perhaps the challenge is to move from a formation looking at people, to one which as Trinh Minh-ha might put it, is an indirected gaze ‘looking nearby’ (2003, page 149; Trinh 1990). That shows the conditions of vision as much as what can be seen, that does not create objects of an all powerful vision nor posits autonomous subjects wielding a neutral technology of representation. To see the possibilities for such indirection, one might look at Said’s and Mohr’s (1986) *After the Last Sky* where Said’s memories of Palestine and Mohr’s photographs are set together. Here both words and pictures are allowed to fail on various occasions – where Said cannot offer a personal experiential side to women’s experiences in pictures, reflecting on the gendered politics of Palestinian society, but also where a picture happens to capture someone he knew and Said is left mourning that so much of her is inaccessible or lost in the picture. While the book overall fulfils a demand or indeed a compulsion to testify, to offer a picture of life, indeed not just their lives but

his, and a living people. Yet in the end what the pictures evidence is an impossibility – the impossibility of homecoming because it no longer exists.

If we look at the persistence of colonial optics, we might look at the spatial imaginary of tourism. However, the effects of this vision play out in a geography of the visual where for instance, in Baltistan in Northern Pakistan, ‘travel photography and travelers’ dress reflect, inform, and produce narratives of modern and not modern’ (Besio 2007, page 54). These restrictions on picturing, in the name of cultural sensitivity, reproduce a category of non-modern located around the female body. The conflicting definitions here of western travelers’ defining traditional as veiled, while urban baltistanis may define modern as wearing a *hijab*, and rural unveiled women in public thus as ‘traditional’, are all set against ‘Western travelers’ physical presence in the village and the possibility that they make take photographs’ which contributes ‘to local productions of tourist spaces that contain travelers and exclude women’ for fear of being pictured (Besio 2007, page 56). One interpretative strategy or visual method to deal with tension of depiction, truth and concealment might be putting the regime of visibility itself on display. Thus to return to Hawai’i, David Prochaska (2000) staged an exhibition of postcards of the islands through four rooms. The first showed the production of postcards including the relabelling of a chicken coop as ‘grass hut’, the retouching and redrawing of pictures. The second confronted the viewer with the sheer volume of postcards from the early twentieth century. The third took them to the site of reception with a bourgeois drawing room, showing the collation into albums and indeed what was written on the reverse of them that might contradict the apparent image. It also showed the same image successively recaptioned in a variety of periods. Finally the last room showed the curators mounting the exhibition, and included the notes and annotations showing the uncertainties about a variety of aspects.

A different undercutting of the adage that seeing is believing can be found in ethnographic film. Marlon Fuentes’ film *Bontoc Eulogy* (1995) uses archive footage, in flickering black and white, to recount an ethnography of his grandfather, who was brought to the USA as a member of the Igorot ‘tribe’ from the Philippines to be exhibited in a ‘native village’ at the St. Louis world fair for popular visual consumption. So at a first level of undercutting colonial visualities, instead of ‘showing’ him as an ‘untouched’ example of premodern life, his grandfather is depicted enmeshed in circuits of power and knowledge that produce him as an ‘exhibit’ - deliberately restaging and destabilising the ethnographic gaze. The film however has a further sting in the tale, since at the very end it puts up a disclaimer that all events and people portrayed are fictional - it thus asks the audience why they might trust such archive footage and about their need to believe in the authority

of ethnographic film (Rony 2003). This is not to say the film is untruthful in broad terms but rather that it might encourage audiences to think about the events portrayed and how they come to (dis)believe in stories about them. It reminds us that all ethnographies are fictions, as in they are all fabricated worlds, and that, to rework the literary theorist Frank Kermode, 'fictions are for finding things out' to which we might add 'they are also for being found out' (Kamberelis 2003, page 693). In this sense we might think of this as an abyssal representation of what was not (quite) there, and a refusal to represent in the terms of the scopic regime of ethnographic knowledge.

In that vein we might look at the deployment of the visual to depict global entanglement rather than stage isolated tableaux. One approach is clearly the insertion of pictures into a fairly normal narrative text of global commodity flows. Thus works like Barndt's (2002) use pictures to humanise narratives, to give otherwise abstract workers faces, as well as to document some of the procedures and points of passage in a large scale commodity chain. Rather more ambitious might be a strategy that deploys the visual as part of the intellectual argument. Sekula's (1995) book on the real and imagined geographies of global trade, *Fish Story*, is a case in point. Sekula is scholar and accomplished photographer who deliberately shows the surreal and surprising conjunctions of forces in his work. Thus, by hanging around docksides where strange combination of goods were being placed on ships crewed by people of diverse national origins, he was looking to frame photographs where 'for one moment the global supply network is comically localised' (*ibid.*, 32). In looking for the 'surreal' in the 'real', taking pictures which jar, Sekula has used photography to critique, rather than to reproduce, disembodied and despatialised knowledges and ways of seeing. Emplacing vision allows us to unpack the fantasies and desires for stable places.

A similar and explicit refiguring of global visions can be found in the video essay *Remote Sensing* by the Swiss artist Ursula Biemann. Among its aims is an explicit reworking of the visual mode of knowledge so that 'Going beyond a critique of capitalism and a deconstruction of encrusted gender models towards a geographic and video-theoretical perspective, the text reflects on the aesthetic strategies that reorganize and visually recode the space in which we write femininity, female sexuality and its economy in the global context' (Biemann 2002b, page 71). Taking up the story of the exotic Other rendered up in a sexualised and eroticized visual economy, Biemann starts to connect this to 'the visual regime involved in setting up the relation between a desirable geography and the desiring gazer with a travel budget' that enacts a 'male gaze of desire from a distance, a gaze that can evaluate, compare, book and buy. This gaze operates as a remote control of the male imaginary over a sexualized and racialized geography; it is a situated, gendered gaze with buying power' (2002b, pages 74-6). Biemann rejects a representational strategy that would contrast

seductive imagery of women as available and desiring to serve with images of enslavement or immiseration since both these representations of female sexuality (seduction and incarceration) function at the poles of a masculine economy of desire and depend upon each other for effect. Her aim instead is to enlarge the space of representation for the feminine. She also wishes to challenge the technological, distanced visualization usually available for global flows and trade:

‘Geography is understood as a visual culture in this context. Satellite media and other geographic information systems are generating profuse quantities of topographic images to be interpreted for scientific, social and military use. Increasingly they make their way into our daily lives, inform the way we think about the world and code our concept of globality. I make it my project to explore how these satellite visions of globality are producing a sexual economy in which it has become thinkable to reorganize women geographically on a global scale.’ (Biemann 2002a, page 77)

Thus she offers a critique of ‘optical technologies [that] monitor, control and visualize the globe and its topographies from an orbital, distanced perspective’ but one that ‘does not target primarily the intervention in the production of the image but in the production of the knowledge derived from the visual data. The idea is to infuse the technological images with highly charged and sexualized human stories. What seems to be an abstract geophysical representation slowly turns into a densely human experience’ (page 79). To do this she produces screens with multiple frames focused around women and landscapes of and in motion (roads, signage, people travelling), overlain by technical locational data (relative times, sunrise, latitude, longitude, passenger ticket numbers, stops on the itinerary). She thus renders visible the traces of global movements of women driven by a sex trade, while she plays on a dialectic of global surveillance and the imagined data shadows of hidden global movements. The layering of women in different spaces and times tries to bring together the disparate yet linked moments in a visual geography. As she describes the intended effects for one part of the video focusing on one woman:

Caroline, who comes from a slum neighborhood in Manila and now works at the Bunny Club in Hong Kong, confesses how exhausted she gets from “entertaining” customers for the rest of the night after she finishes her long hours of dancing on stage. Her close-up is mounted on a satellite image looking down on slowly rotating Pacific Islands, next to a video clip of the pulsing city traffic moving over a bridge at sunset, overlaid with Chinese Characters signifying the word “Observatory”. The surface is overloaded with signs. As Caroline speaks, textual information on Hong Kong’s exact data on Sunrise, Sunset, Moonrise, Civil Twilight and Tidal Changes rolls up suggesting the entanglement of the hardship of a sex worker with factual scientific information. The potentially romantic

moment of the sun setting or the moon rising above the Hong Kong bay is somewhat thwarted by both the sober figures of astrophysics and the compromising survival strategies of a slum girl. (2002b pages 81-2)

Powerful visual imagery can, in this way, help to unpack fantasies of stable places and pure cultures in a world of global flows, dis-location and proliferating hybridity. Moreover, it attempts to dislocate visual knowledge rather than produce further fixed objectifying images (Biemann 2002a, page 80). So this strategy of dislocation offers a play of paradoxical elements - the totalising, global gaze with fragmented experiences, and then the sense of invisible and marginal people evading borders with locational technologies to make their trajectories visible. This vision is not participative nor is it indirect, looking askance or nearby as a way of illuminating its topic. It is reportage yet one that destabilises that reportage through the very technologies of facticity.

Grasping vision, touching the light

One answer to the strong critiques of occularcentrism is that a careful analysis would disentangle critiques about the relationship of vision and knowledge and those about techniques of vision. The two are clearly related but perhaps more complexly than often allowed. Much of the weight of Derrida's critique for instance is about the use of visual language to describe processes of knowledge, not about visual processes per se. In other words a starting point for an answer is that while critics find an all too easy set of slippages from seeing to knowing, and a circumscription of the knowable to the visible, there is an over-quick jump into talking about different bodily senses - which does not itself necessarily changing the 'heliocentric' form of knowledge as say Derrida would have it. We might also suggest that critiques of seeing *all* knowledge as a visual activity does not mean that some arenas of knowledge are properly visual – what might be a classic case of baby and bath water. Yes visual accounts of knowing have been stretched to the point they are dangerous but sometimes they are appropriate. However, I do not think that is really adequate as a position. One of the reasons for beginning this piece with a critique of one form of visibility was to remind us that vision and knowledge do not walk innocently in the world. Rather more importantly we should surely be able to suggest that specific sorts of visual knowledge have become dominant but equally then that other forms are possible. The implication is not then that we should abandon visual methods and techniques but find new ways of thinking them, with new sense of vision of that avoids some of the problems outlined in the first section. Thus in his

‘critique of heliological philosophy, Derrida stresses the manner in which vision itself is given to us through language, and thus that the problematic features of vision are problems not intrinsic to the sense of sight but rather embedded in metaphysical discourse. It is not so simple a matter, therefore, as positing language as an ethical alternative to seeing, for sight only comes to us through its discursive constructions. As such, if we wish to change the violent ways in which we see, we must first change the language of vision.’ (Taylor 2006, #15)

It is not about abandoning the visual and seeking other senses but recasting the visual. We can trace a different sense of sight back via the work of George Berkeley who in his most famous work, largely a seventeenth century rebuttal of Descartes, saw ‘vision as a language, in which visual ideas derive their meaning predominantly by suggesting to us ideas of touch’ (Atherton 1997, page 154). Berkeley’s theorem challenged the notion of vision as being about representation, that is about the production of images first and foremost. Rather than a binary spatial configuration of images inside and of a world outside, Berkeley saw visual stimuli that are tangible and connective. Such a connective sense then draws us to think about light as touching rather distancing. This in many ways is counter intuitive since touch has often been set up as the antithetical form of knowledge of sight – the two hardly coexisting.

‘A significant aspect of light’s texture is that it implicates touch in vision in ways that challenge the traditional differentiation of these senses within the sensible/intelligible binarism of photology. Conceived of in terms of this binarism vision has the distance required for theoretical knowledge and gives the sense of objective certainty and freedom, while the subjective immediacy of contact in the tactile faculty gives the sense of qualitative alteration and intuitive irrefutability. In its sensible indeterminacy as both feeling subject and object being affected, tactile perception is defined as a loss of objectivity in relation to the infinitude of vision’s scope’ (Vasselu 1998, page 12)

Thus we might see the gaze as capable of caressing the beheld where, following Aristotle and Bacon, vision acts through sensation occurring in the *organs* of sense in the beholder in a reciprocal, corporealized form of sight (Biernoff 2005, pages 41-2). In essence then this is seeking a form of visual knowledge that is not founded on the principle of representation. As Hetherington puts it ‘touch in our culture assumes a form of knowledge that is often more proximal than distal in kind.... Proximal knowledge is performative rather than representational. Its nonrepresentational quality is also context-specific, fragmentary, and often mundane. This contrasts with distal knowledge, which generally implies a broad, detached understanding based on knowledge at a distance or on a concern for the big picture’ (2003, page 1934). Distal knowledge implies objects are finished and complete beings whereas proximal understandings see them as continuous,

becoming, and indeed partial and precarious. Hetherington develops a notion here of something inside and outside of representation that he wishes to call *praesentia*: ‘a way of knowing the world that is both inside and outside knowledge as a set of representational practices. It is also performative and generative of knowledge communicated other than through representation. Both a form of the present and a form of presencing something absent’ (2003, page 1937). Hetherington seeks to produce an impure sense of scopic regime of touch. My purpose is perhaps the opposite, to look at the haptic regime of optics. But still to think through the practices that make ‘place as an encounter rather than a representation, one where the distinction between the experiencing subject and experienced object dissolves in the idea of *praesentia*’ (page 1399).

If then we return to tourism photography and think through the practice of picturing we might see it less as about representing the destination than about doing tourism. Nor is it an activity that simply privileges the visual – though it clearly valorizes that in particular ways - we can also locate it and use it to access a wider sensorium. To illustrate this take tourism to the Greek island of Kefalonia. This island, unlike some others, is marketed on the basis of its scenic charms. It has also been connected with the book and film of *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin*. One might argue it has been inserted into a global imaginary and powerful set of visual technologies that are trading on romantic and scenic qualities. Despite the generally hostile reviews of the movie, visual consumption of the island was reemphasised as many acerbically suggested the best actor was the scenery. But this is not to tell a story of a ‘disneyfied’ destination. For sure, the odd tourist has their picture taken in front of ‘Captain Corelli’s bar’. More though stay away as it seems so kitsch. Rather we might look at the pictures as attempts to presence something which is absent – and which was in many ways never there. So if we look at perhaps the canonical site, and sight, of the island – Myrto Beach – this is quite often reduced to a moment of visual consumption. It is reputedly one of the most photographed beaches in the world, and has a long history of appearing in Greek tourist promotional material. More than that nearly every time what is reproduced is one view from above and to the north of the bright white beach and blue shelving sea wrapped around by great cliffs. This visual imagery feeds into tourist practice. Announced some kilometres before you arrive (in fact the signs start on the other side of the island), it is set up as a “must see” and, generally, must photograph, often en route elsewhere. Tour buses disgorge visitors on a specially widened viewing platform, from where they can see the beach as pictured in so many brochures. The platform is a good 5km trip from the beach. Typically they take a picture (see figure 1) – the vision of the beach is recorded not the sensate experience of being on a beach. One might say the circle is complete.

Insert Figure 1 here

And yet this easy story hardly sums up vision in tourism. One simple start is the use of pictures precisely as mementos of presence. Most pictures even of this scenic island do not comprise landscape views. They are records of places visited and moments of action. Do they record what people did? Not entirely, they rather offer us moments where people try to hang on and keep alive the times and spaces of holidays. One strategy is to use pictures then as prompts for stories to get people to talk (see for example Harper 2002; 2003). Pictures do not simply function as visual detachment but rather stand for moments of imaginative contact. They are the basis for reminiscence and recall. What they recall can be varied. So for Kefalonia, people would occasionally seek and take pictures to echo the movie. And yet very often the sites of the movie were hard to find, the pictures might be of the wrong place or wrongly attributed. Does this show that they were in some way failures or alienated from the encounter? Maybe, but more often such pictures are about the ‘atmosphere’. Something that is not visual at all. People were inspired by the romantic ambience of the novel and film, the island is beautiful and often this is what pictures might try and capture – the emotive and affective response of people. The ghost in the pictures is often that absent presence of emotional meaning. These pictures are much more about touching or grasping something, that in that grasping slips away. They do not offer complete closed happenings, but rather are perforated by the sense of connection to the island and the memories of the visit.

INSERT Figure 2 round here

However, the possibilities of visual media as a tool to interrogate tourist practice surely suggest going a little farther. More than that though it allows us to probe some of the silences and absences by trading on the visual currency of tourism. Thus - producing pictures or footage of this process serves to puncture or ground the circulation of the iconic image. It serves to reinscribe the photographer and reembed an otherwise detached vision. One might reinsert the researcher as photographer (Figure 2) which begins to raise the issues of who pictures who in what ways. As tourists are in public and taking pictures legally one may be able to photograph them, but placing them at the centre of gaze restages the power relations that see tourists assuming the right to picture anything and everything. Just as tourists all too often turn people’s everyday lives into spectacles so too the researcher here may end up ‘objectifying’ tourists, rendering their banal practice a spectacle and both tourist and researcher play out what Derrida calls the “right of inspection” (*“droit de regard”*) (Taylor 2006, #17). So figures 1 and 2 offer a double alienation, objectifying an objectifying form of vision, that is perhaps the opposite effect from participatory video. Alternately, one could collaborate with the photography by visitors – indeed the ability to send pictures from

phones and post them on photo sharing sites offers more collaborative moments. But what they also allow is using pictures to open out the inevitable failure of touristic vision to capture the presence of place, and indeed the limits of the visual discourse of the island's marketing (Figure 3) where the romantic is both undercut yet preserved. In figure 3, the picture taken by the researcher suggest the need to emulate and replicate the ideal picture from the movie discourse (above it), yet played across the ironic recognition of its lack of impact on the children playing. The aim is not then to set up a detached or 'real' vision but rather to work and undercutting the visual truths and facts of tourism. The ethnographic image might restage the visual discourse as haunting the image rather than the image confirming the discourse.

INSERT Figures 3 round here

Concluding remarks:

In this chapter I have tried to suggest that using photographic and visual media in geography means being aware of the history of such approaches. That is that these methods come freighted with legacies about desires to see, and assumptions about who has the right to see whom and what. There seems at the moment to be a trend to move from such critiques to dismiss visual media altogether. Alongside this are theoretical critiques of how visual approaches function as a representational metaphor for knowledge. The critique focuses around notions of representation and objectivity and their lure for visual media. I have tried to suggest that taking initiatives like participatory video offers a partial answer – it embeds vision and changes the will to knowledge and desire to see from being the researchers' sole prerogative. It does though often still trade upon a notion of facticity and realism – sometimes to politically strategic effect. It also plays with a desire to be seen and a politics of visibility. We might regard this as regrettable but pragmatic cases have been made that given the power of global scopic regimes, this represents the best political strategy to engage audiences and control some of the knowledge generated.

However, I have tried to return to these issues to suggest that visual methods offer some opportunities to highlight and package precisely scopic regimes themselves. This essay has worked through the picturing of Otherness in touristic and ethnographic discourses to try and show how some of these issues might be reframed. Picking some techniques that undercut the objectifying power and realism of pictures it has tried to find ways of destabilising the association of pictures with the evident. Thus it looked at Biemann's work conjoining global and local happenings – using visualisations more usually associated with locationary and surveillant technologies alongside

desires to make hidden suffering visible, and in so doing tried to reframe a space of the asian feminine that evades standard visual tropes. A variety of more or less ironic strategies then showing the staging the visual seem to offer some ways of playing around this. More fundamentally, it then tried to make some connections to thinking about vision differently. The last section endeavoured to think about it as a way of (also) touching and connecting, rather than (only) detaching and representing. Twisting the work of Hetherington, the aim was to suggest thinking of the visual haptically. My aim was to thus recover the visual by suggesting it is not what we have often thought it to be. I do accept the backdrop of an historic ontological assumption that what is observable is what geography is about, and its elision into observation as method, visual media as recording and envisioning (be that maps or pictures) as technique. And that it seems to me does rumble through the epistemological claims of geography using correspondence theories of truth. But that it seems to me is to accept one form of vision as the model for knowledge and indeed for visuality tout court.

Instead I hope to have shown one can think of other scopic regimes both through specific historic-geographic configurations of spaces of viewing, practices of seeing and ways of presenting but also through thinking about the visual not as detaching and enframing but connective and performative. At a time of the expansion of visual media into new and more portable formats, and the emergence of technologies for sharing pictures it would seem bizarre to choose to reject visual methods. These new media are likely to be offering new scopic regimes, as well as enlarging and energising old ones. It would seem a field into which we could look for some exciting developments intervene. In a discipline that is rediscovering an urge to visualise data, and popular dissemination of global imaging systems that were formerly the domain of experts seems to offer opening for participatory work in a variety of visual genres and medias. Add to this the profusion of visual devices that are recording the social world and it seems an issue of some importance that we should be looking and thinking about how we move our visual practices forwards.

Figure 1





Figure 1: The sign announcing ‘The famous Greek Beach’ of Myrtos is on the other side of the island, the view of the beach reproduced in many promotional materials, tourists taking pictures of the view of the beach.

Figure 2



Taking pictures of tourists taking pictures of Myrtos

Figure 3



Top a movie poster depicting the romantic theme and scenery, redisplayed in a restaurant in Kefalonia. Below, the jetty in the poster being used by children playing.

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